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ABSTRACT

The second of two booklets for Ponca parents, this document identifies seven skills that may be useful in building children's competence and confidence so that they may choose for themselves what their identity and character will be. Suggested advice includes identification with role models; use of the Socratic Method; identification with and responsibility for family processes; development of faith in personal ability; development of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and situational skills; and development of good judgment. A conversation with a Ponca elder on childrearing in the past concludes the booklet. (ERB)

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How To Grow Useful Poncas

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Seven Skills for Living

Produced by
The Ponca Tribal
Parenting Skills Training Project

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SEVEN SKILLS FOR LIVING

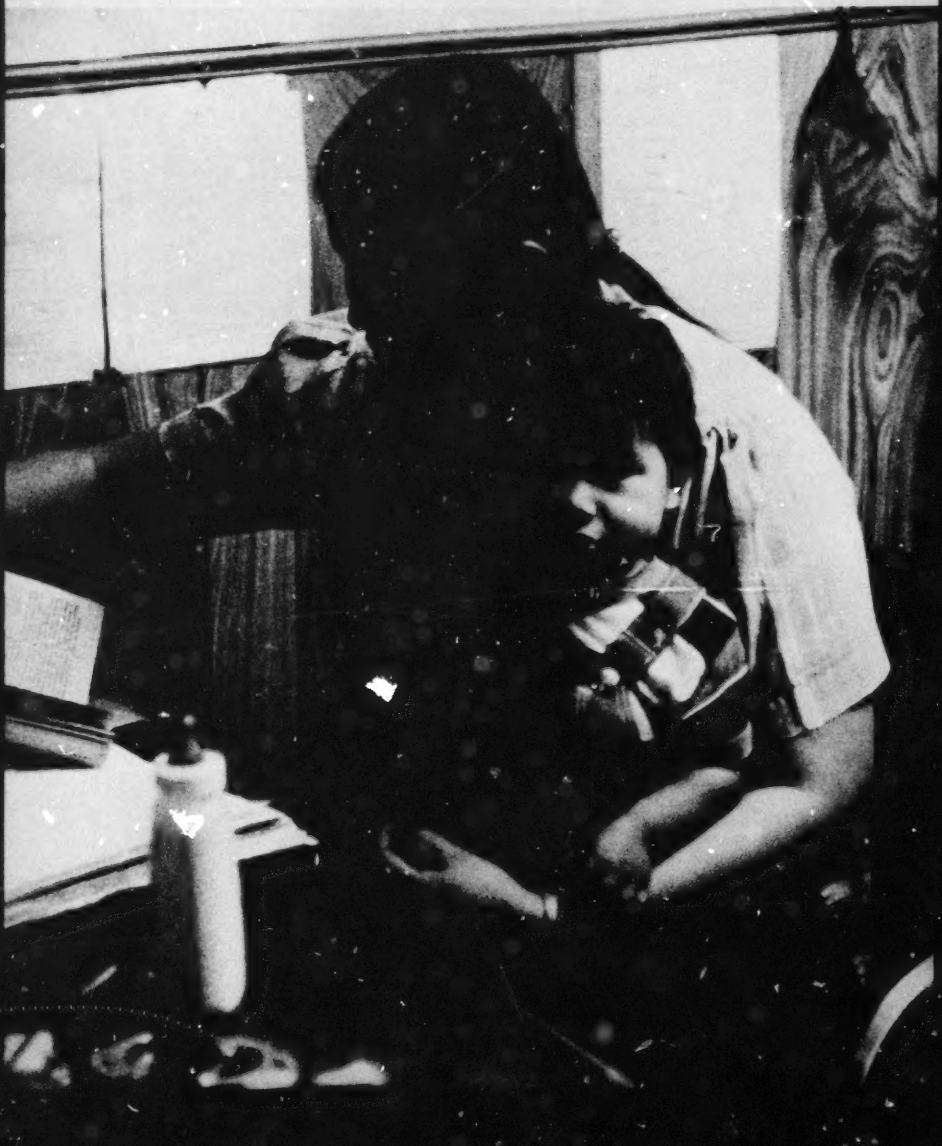
Many of our tribal members are in need of rehabilitation, treatment, and counseling which will make them more successful in their environment. By instilling the following seven skills it is probable that many parents will not have to see their children retooled and reprogrammed in their later life. Intelligent development can be a preventive action. Of course, parents need an idea of what kind of person they would like their children to become. We have heard the story of the tribe in Virginia during Colonial days who withdrew their young men from college, and wrote the president saying, "Our young are returning to our lodges with many strange ideas. They are unable to run, hunt, and are of no particular use to us. Send us your children and we will make men of them."

To us, a useful Ponca would probably be a success in both the Indian world and the White world, and he would be able to function in each. There are a few of our people who are this type, although most feel more comfortable in one world or the other. It is obvious that the dual citizenship responsibilities require a person who has a very strong sense of self, who is not afraid or defensive, who will back down to no one, but will respect everyone. Whatever our ideal type, we need practical methods of building our youngsters' competence and confidence so they can choose for themselves what their identity and character will be. If we give them good lives, they will probably stick to what they know. The premise of this edition is that freedom is good for everyone, but that we need to teach our children how to handle freedom, as well as how to attain it. Those who cannot attain freedom are saddled with addictions, bad habits, unhealthy attitudes, and false images of themselves and society. They are pitiful.

Many parents hear the labels schools and counselors put on their children without being given a clue as to what to do about it. To say a child has low self-esteem does little to explain how a person develops self-esteem. The diagnosis is not the cure. When parents hear experts describe their child's problem without a

solution they feel helpless and frustrated and inadequate. Some withdraw, thinking nothing can be done. Ignoring the problem is less painful than continually failing at attempts to correct it.

Even dealing with children without problems is difficult. The average parent does not know how a self-concept is established, and what they can do to help develop it. The following skills overlap somewhat and they are not in sequence, in a row, but they all affect children's later performance in life.



IDENTIFICATION WITH ROLE MODELS

It is one thing to look at Jim Thorpe or Michael Jackson on a screen, it is quite another to identify with the moods and actions of the adults around you. It is said that suicides run in families because of the distinct type of depression associated with that behavior. Alcoholics express their drunken behavior in the ways they have watched their intoxicated parents act. It is well-known that battered children grow up to abuse the children in their lives. The difference between capable people and people who cannot quite get a grip on their world is relatively small, but children are aware of that difference. The child will grow up to be a high-risk if he does not learn to see himself as a capable person.

Secrets of Capability:
Intelligence is not necessarily an ingredient for productivity, self-sufficiency and happiness. Almost anyone can excel with determination, self-discipline and confidence.

In relationships, people who think of others ahead of themselves are surprised to find out that many people care about them. People who worry about themselves are surprised to find out that their relationships are shallow and meaningless.

The difference between the person who can and the person who can't is the difference between the one who will try and the one who won't.

Parents can become effective role models for their children. Three methods are:

Always treat a child as if he is capable. Children view themselves in the ways they think others see them. When children hear others call them "shy" or "clumsy," they think of themselves as shy or clumsy. When people use such phrases as, "Why can't you ever . . .?" children think they *never* do anything right. This negative comment attacks them as a person rather than focusing on their deeds. It makes children feel that they are not competent, capable, or successful. Parents can say, "You did a bad thing," not, "You are a bad girl." In addition, parents can give their child a boost even when correcting them by adding, "You did a bad thing. This surprises me, because you are such a good girl."

Always remember that a child is not just a short adult. A child has a different perspective on the world, sees things in a different time frame, has different conceptual abilities, and is in the middle of developmental tasks that are different from those of an adult. To expect the child to have an adult perspective leads to feelings of powerlessness and inferiority as they do not feel they measure up to these adult perceptions and expectations. Do not use the phrases you hated to hear as a young person which now seem very logical to you, such as:

"How many times do I have to tell you . . .?"
"You'll appreciate this when you are older . . ."
"Why can't you ever . . ."
"I'm doing this for your own good . . ."

You need not abandon your role as an adult, teacher, and protector in order to be effective. Your instruction is listened to better when you build your children up instead of putting them down.

Help young people understand what happens to them in their lives and how they can gain control over what happens. This section encourages you as a parent to use a different, but older, philosophy of instruction. Whenever a parent tells a child, "This is what happened, and this is what you should do," he is really saying, "Listen, dummy, quit trying to think for yourself. If you had just left the thinking up to me, everything would have been all right." That focuses on the child's incapabilities. It is more helpful to ask, "What happened?" "What caused it to happen?" "How could you do it next time?"

In the military, a Private may be told that he is not paid to think by his Sergeant. This method may work in the middle of a firefight, but it will not help your child grow up. The dictatorial force-fed method is didactic and pedantic, that is, one-way, all the way. In ancient Greece a philosopher named Socrates invented a better method of teaching. He believed the Truth was available to everyone if they just looked for it. His role as a teacher was to constantly ask questions about what the student knew and saw. He saw himself as the midwife to the truth. Parents can use the *Socratic Method* to allow their child to understand his experiences by asking helpful questions about the meaning of events in his life.

You can start by asking about any event, a grade from school, a fight, a fun party, or a TV program. Choose something they can easily remember, the fresher the better.

Step 1. Name It. Ask them, "What was that?" "What did you see?" "What was important?" "What did you like about it?" Just asking a child these ques-

tions boosts their self-concept. They become a participant in life; an enunciator, an observer, a commentator.

Step 2. Study It. Let them kick it around, look at it from different sides. Ask them, "So what?" "Why was it important?" Let them attribute meaning to the event in their own terms, giving it their own significance. Do not say "Why did you do that?" instead say:

"What was there about it that made it important?" "Why did it happen to you (or us)?"—focusing on the event, not the child.

Step 3 Use It. Project the event and its meaning to the future. Ask, "How can you use this?" "How can you do it differently next time?" "If you wanted to feel the same way or differently next time, what would you do?"

The parent's role is to be a good listener and prodder, a midwife to the truth. This is consistent with the observation of many teachers that students who are able to teach a lesson themselves will never forget that lesson. In this method, the child teaches himself the lesson.

The Socratic Method is helpful in trying to understand someone else's perception of what is happening. Sitting through the same experience does not necessarily mean that two people of different generations will see the same thing. Each person's mind is unique. Each person sees things differently. Here is an example of the Socratic Method. A parent asks the child to clean up the living room. After a few minutes the child is outside playing with friends. The parent goes into the living room and sees that a few things have been rearranged and the child's toys are missing. However, the floor is still dirty and some filled ashtrays and glasses are still around. The typical reaction is:

Parent: Get your neenday back in here right now!

Child: What?

Parent: I thought I told you to clean this room. Are your ears clogged or what?

Child: (confused) I did already.

Parent: Just look at this. This isn't clean. The floor isn't swept and look at those ashtrays and records and glasses! There will be no more socializing until this is spic and span. When you think it's clean, call me and I'll inspect it. No more playing until I say it's perfect!

Child: (mumbles and slowly moves to the broom).

This is a parental tantrum, defended with clever statements about the importance of the child learning responsibility or learning to work. The real effect, though, is telling the child she is not capable and her efforts are suspect. The adult assumes that "Clean up the living room" is a clearly understood statement and that everyone has the same perspective.

What is the goal here? Is a clean living room more important than preventing a dependent hostile victimized personality? The living room would probably get cleaner if the Socratic Method were used, plus the child would feel capable and appreciated. Here is the caring, effective questioning method:

Socratic Method	Actor	Statement
	Parent:	Hey, you got a minute?
	Child:	What's up?
(Name It)	**Parent:**	Remember when I asked you to clean up the living room? (Child nods.) Would you tell me what you thought that meant?
	Child:	Well, I guess you wanted me to pick up my stuff and put it out of the way.
	Parent:	I see. You thought I wanted you to clean your things out.
	Child:	That's the truth, honest.
	Parent:	What I really wanted was to have you sweep the floor, empty the ashtrays and remove the glasses, besides moving your toys.
	Child:	Oh!
(Study It)	**Parent:**	Why don't you think we understood each other other very well?
	Child:	I guess I thought you just wanted me to clean up my stuff. No one is coming over this late. I didn't know I was supposed to do that other stuff, too.
	Parent:	I would like you to do that now, please.

	Child:	Sure.
(Use It)	**Parent:**	By the way, how are we *going to be sure you* understand better next time?
	Child:	I don't know. I thought I did okay.
	Parent:	Well, you did, and I appreciate what you did. Next time I'll try to say more clearly what I expect. And if you're not sure of what I mean, then tell me you don't understand. Will you do that?
	Child:	To the max. By the way, what else needs to be done?

Parents can get more out of a child by listening than by talking. And only by listening can the parent open the child's ears to listen and learn also. In this case, parents legitimize the child's right to think and feel. The message is "You are capable."

IDENTIFICATION WITH AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR "FAMILY PROCESSES"

The word "family" is used in a broad sense here. "Fitting in" is important; the child must feel his life matters, that he is contributing in a meaningful way to things greater than himself. This is a fairly recent problem generally, resulting from the shift in interaction time from close to six hours a day to less than 14½ minutes. In the old tribal days, there were not years and years of "lazing around" where youth were not allowed to work or contribute with real assignments. Either you were a child or a man in the old days, with no prolonged teenage period. A quick transition, marked by a ceremony, followed soon by marriage. No time to be useless or idle. The reservation era encouraged Poncas to live off of lease money and to not take care of themselves in a hard life. Many do not understand that what they do does affect others.

To keep families working together parents will have to go out of their way to create opportunities for their children to take responsibility. This must be done without "make work" assignments. Even the youngest can help carry in groceries or turn out lights at night. In modern treatment centers the clients are given rules and privileges to maintain the therapeutic "family" they are in. With mobile lifestyles many people feel no attachments or obligations to others. Parents can also include children in household chores and special projects such as housepainting or gardening.

If parents always are doing things for their children they can cause feelings of indebtedness which can turn to anger and resentment. Allowing your child opportunities to contribute to others will let him/her feel important and valuable. A child will see himself as he perceives others see him.

Family meetings are a good idea, on a weekly or biweekly basis. The meeting should not be too long or too serious, and should give all the members a chance

to express themselves. Family business, opening remarks, histories, and features should be included, followed by enjoyable activities and treats. These meetings start slowly, but members soon look forward to them, and an extremely positive and unifying effect will be the result.

DEVELOPING FAITH IN PERSONAL ABILITY

This skill is the ability and attitude necessary to work through problems. Its opposite is escape, through drugs or other means. The escapist is a dependent personality who believes that solutions are luck and other things out of his control. Things either happen or don't happen.

On television, there are always miracle resolutions to problems. Toothpaste that wins love. Superman or the cavalry arrive just in time. In real life, parents are always bailing their children out of situations. What the child then loses is the sense of internal control. He may dream of riding in a car with no steering wheel. He may feel like a Pac-man where someone else is handling the joy-stick. In extreme instances the child hallucinates demons who make him do things, or he says he is a robot somone else controls. In most cases he is just someone who depends excessively on others, seeing himself powerless, a victim. History has given the tribes a Great White Father who takes care of their needs or betrays them capriciously.

Parents need to allow natural outcomes if they can afford to let them happen. If the child doesn't feed his goldfish, perhaps they should die with an elaborate funeral instead of the parents taking up the slack and feeding them. Maybe the teenager should lose his summer job if his momma has to always wake him up. Parents cannot make life as easy as possible in their love, shielding their children from outcomes which cause stress, anxiety, anger or frustration. You cannot buy children all the toys their friends have, or relax their curfew when everyone else in the neighborhood does. This produces the opposite effect; the

child feels insecure, impotent and unloved. Children desire structure and are unable to establish it for themselves.

Powerlessness can also come from too strict an upbringing; the children feel they can never measure up to the too-high standards and expectations. They sense failure and defeat and fear trying anything after a while.

DEVELOPING INTRAPERSONAL SKILLS

"Know thyself." Children must learn to communicate with themselves. They must recognize and understand their own feelings. They must learn self-discipline and self-control. If there is no "center" to stabilize the child's behavior, they are in danger of being at the mercy of their friends for emotional and social development, or even of acting without conscience as a sociopath. Persons weak in this area are unable to cope with pressure or stress, are dishonest with themselves, cannot defer gratification and have an undeveloped self-concept and low self-esteem.

Parents can help children know themselves by assisting them with the Socratic Method. Noticing and naming events in their lives, studying and applying it with the questions "What happened?" "Why was it important?" and "How can you apply it next time?" They learn they can make decisions and act with intent. Parents must allow the environment to prevent or correct the child's self-destructive behavior. Parents can share their own memories of their early experiences, saying, "I remember feeling upset about this too when it first happened to me. I was really mad so I _____ and what happened to me was _____. It may not happen just that way for you, but that was my experience.

Parents can guide their children through negative experiences also, as long as they are encouraging the next step of self-assessment. Once feelings are identified, and their effect admitted, then he needs to decide what he wants to do with those feelings from

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then on. He is therefore responsible for the future of his feelings—either nuturing them or working through and dealing with them in the future. At least they are not denied. If parents say, "I know you don't really hate your teacher," but the child really does, he feels guilty. His feeling is not acceptable. So he hides it, becomes bitter, and cannot unload it. It may come out in an inappropriate or dangerous way. If a child's feelings are recognized as legitimate, he can act on them or change them, as appropriate. Self-assessment takes much time and patience from both child and parent.

DEVELOPING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Parents want their children to get along with others, but in order to know happiness and joy, children must learn skills which will enable them to establish deep and intimate human relationships. These skills start with conversational ability, and include the ability to share ideas and feelings, to sense the feelings and needs of others, to cooperate, empathize, negotiate, and to give and receive love. These skills hinge on the adequacy of listening skills. If parents cannot listen to children they will soon find themselves "tuned out." For example:

Teenager: I am in a situation where I have strong feelings. I don't think you appreciate the fact that I'm older, that I have the ability and the **developmental need** to think through a problem and come tc an independent conclusion. I don't need your help on this one. My experience and my feelings are obviously not appreciated or understood by you or you would not be standing there telling me these things.

Parent: I know exactly what you are saying and how you feel because I was exactly the same way. However, with my 20-20 hindsight, my current set of

values and my insight on the world I now see that what matters to you **shouldn't** matter to you. Here, look at it through my forty-year old eyes and with my forty-year old values. Forget having sixteen-year old values and feelings because they are shallow and hollow. Mine are better and you should adopt them. Being sixteen is no excuse for acting like a sixteen-year old.

Teenager: You just don't understand. (You don't listen; you don't learn; you don't care).

These interchanges put distance between parent and teenager. Teenagers have to establish their own identity as a separate thinking and feeling person. The solution? Listen—truly listen—to what the child has to say. Advice given sparingly is valued more. Parents may find it difficult to share their feelings, making them vulnerable and human to those in the family. This is the only way to teach young people how to develop meaningful relationships, though. The risk is the parent's image as master of the castle. The authoritarian role must be abandoned to open the family up to negotiation, cooperation and compromise. Without this small sacrifice, though, the children may grow up to be emotional cripples and misfits.

DEVELOPING SITUATIONAL SKILLS

The flip side of freedom is responsibility. While we want to give our children freedom of choice and behavior, we need to be sure that they can respond to the limits which exist in many situations and can accept the consequences of their behavior. People who don't learn this are inflexible, they see themselves as victims, they try to blame others for their mistakes. Their choices seldom result in harmonious and productive outcomes. They are trouble. They are stubborn. They blame the system all the time. They are unfamiliar with development in their personal lives which can make them responsible, adaptable, and flexible. They are not mature in the ways that make them comfortable in a variety of situations. They are blind in that they cannot associate the consequences with their decisions.

This kind of maturity is prevented by parents who only express love to their children in ways that the children associate with things they have done. For example, when a child cleans up the kitchen, we should not love her for cleaning up the kitchen. We are happy about the kitchen because the floor was scrubbed. When we respond to children just when they have done good they see themselves as purchasing love, buying attention. That produces dependency and emotional insecurity. The first time they do something bad it is all connected with who they are. They become unworthy and unlovable. If what they do is connected with who they are, they are highly vulnerable children. The solution has two parts. The first is to hug them for no reason at all. The second is to separate the child from what he does. Practice this sentence: I feel _____ about _____ because _____. For example, I feel happy about how the kitchen looks because the floor was scrubbed. That way the child understands how he achieved your pleasure in that situation. Or "I feel unhappy about the way the bedroom looks because you did not clean under the bed." He can see that if he cleans under the bed you will be happy and still love him. You do not say "**You** make me angry. **You** messed up again. Why can't **you** ever do what **you** are told?" Each **you** is a fist in his face and tangles up who he is with what he has not done. You create hostility. If he cannot hit you, he'll hit something else. If he cannot express his feelings, he will become depressed, and that means sick.

Separating the child from his acts is the groundwork for teaching him to accept the consequences of his behavior. He must also see the logical and natural consequences of his decisions.

Following is an example of punishment in which the father is more interested in teaching his son responsibility than anything else. If he maintains dignity and respect the close relationship will continue. If he instead reacts in anger, the son will be frustrated and angry and would blame the father rather than see the outcome of his own behavior as the logical consequence.

Father: Son, we need to sit down and talk for a minute. I have not been able to get you to do this task. Why do you think it has not been getting done?

Son: Well, Dad, I guess I've been going out too much. I'll get it done, promise.

Father: Are you saying you'll get busy and get it done? If so, I'll believe you. But just to be sure, if you decide not to do it between now and Thursday, I think you should stay home for two weeks. Is that clear? I hope you will decide to do it because I know you're up for that big dance Friday night.

Son: Okay, Dad.

(Thursday comes and the work is not done.)

Father: I was really surprised that you decided not to go out for two weeks. I know how much you were looking forward to that dance.

Son: What do you mean, I decided not to go out?

Father: As you recall, we talked about it. Work was to be done by Thursday or you would not go out. I came home last night and it wasn't done. I have to respect your decision not to go out.

Son: But I already have a date and everything. I can finish it next week, promise. People are counting on me. You can't do this to me!

Father: I can understand all of that. I really agree, it is going to mess you up badly. That is why it really surprised me that you decided to handle it this way.

Notice three important parts of this situation:

1. The work was understood and agreed upon in advance.

2. The consequences were known in advance.

3. The father always said things like "I'm surprised you decided not to go out," and "I'll have to respect your decision." Never once did he say, "I'm grounding you." **The son grounded himself**. This is how the young man will learn how his behavior affects his life.

That was a logical consequence. Natural consequences work better. Nature is less merciful, and is a silent teacher. If a child rides a horse hard at dark and doesn't bed it down correctly, the horse will die. If you do not put enough gas in the car, it will run out every time. If the teenager oversleeps, he loses his job. Parents should not interfere with natural consequences if they can afford to.

DEVELOPING GOOD JUDGMENT

Judgmental skills include the ability to recognize, understand and apply relationships in our environment. They are a product of experience. People who are weak in this area are in a constant state of crisis—financial, personal or legal. They live for short-term satisfaction or overindulge their appetites or pursuits to the extent that they interfere with other necessary life activities. The opportunity to make choices is something children need at every level. Parents sometimes rob their children of the freedom to choose early in life.

The Socratic Method is one way of developing perceptions in young people. It helps them to understand their experiences. What has happened? Why did it happen? What can we do next time to guarantee or prevent its happening again? Further useful questions are:

1. What is significant about the experience?
2. Why is that significant?
3. How does it affect the decisions I make in the future?

A CONVERSATION WITH SIMON HORSECHIEF EAGLE

A long time ago my father told me, "Simon you think you have it hard now, but in my time the only thing that kept us alive was buffalo. Buffalo was used to make teepees, shoes and clothes, and to make pounded meat to last all winter.

Before I went to bed, father would always tell me stories. Crazy as I am, I would listen to him and remember, that's why I know things now.

Indians long ago never buried the dead—they put their bodies on top of trees.

Father always told me I was the meanest one in the family. He made a strap from a branch for us kids. He would use it when we were too noisy while he was telling stories to his friends. He would never let us listen—always said kids were made to be seen—not heard—especially when grownups are talking.

When children were sick long ago, Indians never took them to the hospital. They took them to Indian doctors who used herbs to heal them. They would get better.

To make naughty kids behave, Indians would tie their feet together to make them sit still—they would never let them run around like they do now days at these dances.

Children were taught to always respect their elders—to respect everything that God gave them. They were especially taught to share their food and if they didn't have any food, to share water with visitors.